Commission on High School Graduation Achievement and Success Meeting
November 8, 2012
10:00 am – 12:00 pm
Chicago – Lt. Governor's Videoconference Room
JRTC – 100 W. Randolph, 15th Floor
Springfield – Lieutenant Governor's Office
Stratton – Room 412

Minutes

Springfield: Lynn Haeffele, Rhonda Jenkins, Al Llorens, Jeffrey Mays, Dianna Sullivan (for Candace Mueller), Diane Rutledge, Julie Wollerman

Chicago: Elaine Allensworth, Miguel del Valle, Stacy Davis-Gates, Rich Lesniak, Jane Russell, Cathy Schaevel, Julie Smith, Leslie Ward

Phone: Andrea Brown, Vanessa Kinder, Sen. Luechtefeld, Jack Wuest

I. **Welcome**

Co-chair Miguel del Valle welcomed members and led introductions.

II. **Review of Minutes**

The prior meeting's minutes were approved with the correction one misspelled name and the addition of one participating member who was omitted.

III. **Early Warning Indicators Presentation**

a. **Background Factors**

i. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: Gender is the biggest risk factor for dropping out. Within any race there is a huge gap in graduation rates between girls and boys. There is also a host of variables that are associated with dropping out such as gender, race, poverty, test scores, mobility, over-age for grade, special education status, ELL status in high school. Additionally, both race and mobility are highly associated with poverty.

ii. <u>Miguel De Valle</u>: Is the list ranked?

1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: In general the ranking is correct, although poverty is higher than race as a factor.

iii. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: If you hold back students you increase their risk of dropping out. If a student doesn't enter high school until age 15 or 16 and takes four years to graduate it means they have to stay in school until they're 19 or 20. You often don't see the effects of retention right away because when they're 16 it seems normal with other 16 year olds in the high school but by the time they reach 19 or 20 it becomes developmentally odd. They encounter other life responsibilities which makes it unlikely for them to stay in school.

iv. <u>Rich Lesniak</u>: If you hold back a student at a younger age (2nd or 3rd grade, for example) does that still factor into this?

1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: Yes, it doesn't matter when they're held back unless they managed to catch up and skip a grade. If they enter high school at age 15 or older they are at a very high risk of dropping out.

b. **The 'on-track' indicator**
- i. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: Using test scores, race, ethnicity, gender, poverty socioeconomic status, mobility and age when they enter high school only allows me to correctly predict 65% of graduates and 48% of non-graduates because even though they are all related to graduation, they are not strongly related to graduation. Even looking at African American males, of which 50% graduate, also means 50% don't so I don't know based on whether someone's an African American male if they will graduate or not. The exception to this is Asian students, who are very likely to graduate. But even then there are 10% of those boys that don't graduate in Chicago. So these factors are associated but it's not destiny; the correlation isn't at an incredibly strong level. For a long time people thought an accurate prediction of graduation was not possible because of all the outside factors that affect graduation. However we've found that we can make an accurate prediction because these factors do affect graduation. But they do so by affecting a student's performance in their high school classes. If we look at how students perform in their first year in high school we have an indicator. It's a very simple indicator of whether students have made basic progress in their 9th grade year based on if they have enough credits to be counted as sophomores and if they have no more than one semester F. That one indicator by itself correctly identifies 80% of graduates; it's much better than any of the predictors or all of them combined. If I look at this indicator combined with all the other factors I can correctly predict only 81% of graduates – a tiny improvement on the on-track indicator alone.
- ii. <u>Stacy Davis-Gates</u>: How do these factors relate to the types of schools that they go to and whether the resources are there to keep them on-track?
    - 1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: Very strongly and there are strong school effects on whether students pass their classes. A lot of students who do well in 8th grade with good test scores and grades go to high school and end up doing poorly. The success of their transition really depends on the school they're going into. That 9th grade year is very critical and if you can get them over that hump they tend to do well.
- iii. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: We can identify students who are at risk quite easily with this information, which suggests the way to improve graduation rates is to improve their classroom performance. It makes the problem easier because we don't have to fix those outside issues of poverty, gangs, drugs or other issues that may interfere with performance. The on track indicator is so strong that students who are on track in 9th grade are four times more likely to graduate than students who are off track. They are also 85% likely to graduate within 5 years.

c. **Test scores and the on-track indicator**
- i. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: A lot of times support programs are based around students who have low test scores because there's a belief that kids with low test scores are more likely to fail, and they are. However, if you look at students who come in with the top test scores, about a fifth of students who enter school with scores in the top quartile end up off track in the 9th grade. Only 37% of those kids end up graduating despite their strong test scores. In comparison, only 42% of students that come into high school with very low test scores ended up on track. But of those that did, 68% of them ended up

graduating so they are much more likely to graduate than students with the top test scores who were not on track. This indicates that the on track indicator is much more important than test scores.

    ii. <u>Al Llorens</u>: Is the test you're referencing the ISAT?

        1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: No, we used the ITBS (Iowa Tests of Basic Skills) for this 2000 study but we've replicated it with the ISAT in more recent years. We've seen these patterns over and over and this has been replicated in cities all over the nation.

d. Graduation and the on-track indicator

    i. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: You can forecast graduation rates by looking at on track rates. Graduation rates are a little more stable over time than on-track because it's not a 1:1 ratio; not all on track students graduate but about 80% of them do. However, if there's an increase in on-track you can see four years later the same students cause the graduation rate to increase. The on- track indicator is a summative indicator that can be used at the end of the year to determine how students did and to forecast graduation rates four years later, but you can't really use it for intervention.

e. Intervention indicators

    i. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: The on-track indicator can't really be used for intervention purposes. However since it's based on course performance you can use other indicators of how students are doing in their classes early on in the 9th grade to target students for intervention. Students' GPAs are the best predictor of graduation. Course failures are also a strong predictor but slightly weaker as a predictor of non-graduates because students pass their classes with D's and end up slipping in future years. Absences are also a very strong predictor, again a little less strong because some students are coming to class but still not doing well. Any of these factors can be used, absences can be determined within the first week, failures and GPA by the first quarter.

f. GPA

    i. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: GPA specifically is an extremely strong predictor. Looking at the chart, 25% of students in Chicago had GPA's of 3.0 or above and almost all of them graduate. Additionally, almost all of these students are low income (Chicago is 85% low income, 85% minority). These are low income students who made a successful transition, they got A's and B's in their 9th grade year and they all graduated. Of the students that failed half or more of their classes and have a GPA of 1.0 or less, almost none of them graduate. This is where most intervention programs are targeted, to those that fail half or more of their courses with a 5% chance of graduating. They are going to need very strong intervention and oftentimes giving them a mentor or putting them in a special support class won't be enough – they need really intensive support. However, you can use these indicators to think about what students will need. Those students with a 1.5-2.0 GPA, the C- students, are the students that could go either way. In most schools until we started doing this work these students were ignored because everyone thought they were doing alright since they were passing most of their classes but these are the students that could benefit from modest intervention efforts. Since they don't appear to be doing bad like those that are failing, they don't get any support while

students that are failing multiple classes get modest support. Meanwhile those C-students start to lag behind and end up dropping out.

ii. <u>Stacy Davis-Gates</u>: What I've seen especially in regards to testing is that these C-students are now getting more support because they are termed the 'bubble' students. The network chiefs in Chicago are very involved in moving the bubble students over to improve test scores and so-forth. Saturday schools and modest interventions are now going to the 'bubble' students. That's where the extra mentorship is going.

    1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: This is specifically referencing GPA not test scores. It makes sense actually to use grades that way and Chicago has become much savvier about looking at how students are doing and targeting the right students. Obviously it depends on the specific school and network but Chicago is becoming much savvier about how it targets support.

iii. <u>Al Llorens</u>: Sometimes a 'D' grade is a bit misleading, simply because there's been pressure put on schools and districts through NCLB to minimize failure rates and maximize graduation rates and teachers are pushed to give a kid a D as opposed to an F knowing that the student doesn't have content mastery. The kid moves forward and it appears that they're passing but in reality content mastery is not there. So it's really important to understand what preparation a student has and I think the intervention needs to be before the 9th grade level.

    1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: Even students with high test scores and grades struggle when they get to 9th grade because passing classes is only slightly based on content mastery. It's more about whether the student is coming to class and many other cognitive factors that end up being much more important in college and career readiness success. It's about whether the student got their work done, did they do their work on time, was it of high quality, did they participate in class. So there's a lot more that goes into grades than understanding the material but you're absolutely right. If you look at the amount of gains students make on their test scores, students who get D's don't actually learn more than those who get F's on average. D's primarily indicate that a student showed up and put in minimal effort; it's not an indicator of learning at all. On the other hand they do get the credit which allows them to graduate. Whether passing them is right or wrong is a whole other debate.

        a. <u>Jeff Mays</u>: I don't think it is a separate debate. This commission is about achievement and *success* and I think we have a low bar if we think moving them through is success.

iv. <u>Julie Smith</u>: What is the distribution for students in terms of grades? How many get into that range of 3.0-4.0?

    1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: It depends on the school district. In Chicago only a quarter of students fall within that range and there are a lot of students, especially boys that are in that D range or below. It's very rare for boys to have the strong grades. High grades are the biggest predictor of college success because they represent not just how well a student does on the content but all those other factors you need to succeed.

      v. <u>Andrea Brown</u>: The real challenge is going to be how we set expectations. We're assuming that NCLB is going away but we will have to set expectations within our state and right now there are a lot of different states doing that in unusual ways, setting different expectations based on those out of school factors you mentioned earlier. I think we have to put student achievement in that context.

g. Course Failures

      i. <u>Elaine Allensworth:</u> For each semester course failure a student receives, their probability of graduating is lowered by about 15%. That's because graduation is about getting the necessary credits which they can't do if they fail. So there's a very direct relationship.

h. Absences

      i. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: We tend to think of students that drop out as those that are missing a lot of school but even a week of absences in the first semester of 9th grade year decreases the likelihood of graduating by 25%. Another week causes it to decrease by another 20%. If a student misses two weeks in their first semester their probability of graduating goes down to 41% from 87%. Even small amounts of absences that start in the beginning tend to get bigger and bigger. Schools that are able to stop that right away and make sure kids are coming to class their 9th grade year with the expectation of 100% attendance have a lot more students passing classes and higher graduation rates. Schools can't contact the home after two weeks of absences. At that point it's too late and there's a high likelihood of failing; they must contact them right away.

      ii. <u>Al Llorens</u>: Order is an important part of any school. It can be difficult to have a productive learning environment if there are constant distractions.

      iii. Members mentioned the Freshman Connection Program and other efforts to have early interventions for high school students, noting that more than academic support is needed.

      iv. <u>Stacy Davis-Gates</u>: A decrease in suspensions would greatly help the issue of absences. Additionally, if data can be used to show parents the on-track program, during teacher conferences, that could help get them more engaged.

      v. <u>Al Llorens</u>: When do absences officially begin? In my school, kids would often start the year 2-3 weeks late. I believe they should be counted as absences because often kids who miss that much school are the ones who end up dropping out.

i. Students with Disabilities

      i. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: Students who start high school two years below grade level are less likely to graduate. This holds true for students that also have a learning disability or a mild cognitive disability or an emotional disturbance. Those with emotional disturbance are especially at risk of not graduating. Students with disabilities are also more likely to be off track and to be more off track. They are also more likely to be on the low end of on track. At both levels they are less likely to graduate and the main reason is because of very high absences among students with disabilities.

      ii. <u>Stacey Davis-Gates</u>: Why are those students more likely to miss school?

          1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: There are many reasons and they may be associated with their disability.

      iii. <u>Al Llorens</u>: Are special ed interventions in place? Is there sufficient staffing and resources for these students?

1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: The students without identified disabilities that are two or more years below grade level are not considered to have a disability so they don't receive that support but they are actually more likely to be off track than students with identified learning disabilities. These students are more likely to be female, which is strange.
    iv. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: Students with emotional disturbances have the worst attendance rates and suspensions play a role in that.
j. **English Language Learners**
    i. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: The vast majority of English language learners are Hispanic and they are very different from African Americans, Whites and Asians in their outcomes although the patterns are remarkably similar. If we look at students who are new to CPS in middle school or high school, those that are new to the country are very likely to be on track. They have very high attendance and are more likely to pass classes than typical Hispanic students. However even those that are on-track are less likely to graduate than other on-track students. Those who have been in the system for years but have never achieved proficiency in English are less likely to be on track and many have identified disabilities and look a lot like others with identified disabilities. This makes sense since they've remained in ELL status for such a long period. Students who have started out as ELLs but have achieved proficiency before high school are as likely to graduate as other students. Students that have been proficient since elementary school are more likely to be on track and more likely to graduate than non ELL students. The biggest reason for the disparity between new ELL students and long-term proficient Hispanic students is the high school they attend. They are unlikely to attend the magnet schools or the higher performing high schools. The new ELLs are new to the system and can't navigate it and long-term ELLs students have test scores that prevent access to those schools. Those that are new to CPS in sixth grade also tend to enter high school past the age of 14; they also tend to have lower educational aspirations.
k. **Middle School to High School Transition**
    i. Members inquired about relationship between a student's ability to read and their performance in their 9th grade classes.
        1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: There is a modest relationship but their 8th grade grades are a much stronger predictor of their 9th grade test scores by far.
    ii. <u>Jeff Mays</u>: Does that also hold true for math?
        1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: Yes, although math has a slightly stronger relationship.
    iii. <u>Lynn Haeffele</u>: What we're talking about goes back to the point about what happen before a student goes to high school. The grades are a great predictor but it also raises the question of what is the predictor of the predictor?
        1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: We've looked at many factors in middle school such as grades, attendance, test scores, test score growth, non-cognitive factors such as study habits and what we've found is that you don't get a good predictor of high school performance based on middle school performance. It gives us a moderate prediction but high school is an entirely new context. Students with strong grades and test scores move to high school and suddenly become C or D students. Performance declines as students move to high school. Grades decline

by about half a grade point and absences go way up. However, what we can tell is that students with Fs in high school are almost certainly going to fail in high school. The same goes for students with a 90% attendance rate in middle school. On average a student's unexcused absences will quadruple in high school and they will miss a month of school.

    iv. <u>Julie Wollerman</u>: Is it unexcused absences that increase or all absences?

        1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: It is unexcused absences – excused absences remain at the same level.

    v. <u>Al Llorens</u>: Have you done any research on the effects of musical talent or multiple language acquisition in elementary school on a student's performance?

        1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: No we have not.

    vi. <u>Jeff Mays</u>: In 8th grade, test scores and grades are not a big deal but attendance is?

        1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: No. 8th grade grades are the strongest predictor of 9th grade grades and the same holds true for test scores and attendance. However, there is more variation in grades and attendance than in test scores.

    vii. <u>Diane Rutledge:</u> Have you had the opportunity to take a look at the effect of freshmen academies that try to address some of these issues?

        1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: It seems like the big difference between high school and elementary is in monitoring and supporting the students. In 9th grade students say they are freer, they don't have to go to class and teachers won't make them do their work. They confuse responsibility with freedom. In 8th grade teachers are more familiar with the students and monitor them much more. In 9th grade teachers believe it's the student's problem if they don't do their work and that failing will teach them. Unfortunately they don't learn by failing, it just makes them feel angry and they withdraw from school.

    viii. <u>Al Llorens</u>: Unfortunately in many cases teachers can't teach content unless they address the behavioral issues in the class.

        1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: That's very true and a big predictor of learning gains in the school is whether the school is orderly and controlled because you can't have instruction if you have a chaotic school. Teachers struggle with that because they learn to teach content and not how to work through these other issues.

    ix. <u>Stacey Davis-Gates</u>: There is a revitalization of who is a teacher. Many new teachers only go through a 5 month program and don't acquire much knowledge of adolescent psychology or how to manage behavior or form relationships with their students.

l. Data Use by CPS

    i. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: CPS has recently been very successful in using data to improve on track and graduation rates. In 2008 CPS created a real time data system around 9th grade indicators. It was an early warning system that gave schools lists of students who were flagged for risk factors based on 8th grade data. In 9th grade they would get lists of students that were flagged if their absences suddenly increased or they received an F. It also offered a credit recovery report detailing which students had to make up classes and how they could do that. The lists came out on a weekly basis and were a tremendous help to the schools.

ii. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: This allowed teachers to devise strategies to support the students. Teachers with the same students started collaborating together. Some schools had on track coordinators. Schools came up with different plans to make sure students were not falling through the cracks. One school had every student's teacher call home if they missed a day and that made the students realize they can't get away with skipping school and also established relationships between teachers and parents.

iii. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: Research shows that if students receive the help they need right away then they start to see teachers as very supportive and caring. If no one reaches out to them they fall further and further behind. If you could catch the students really early on then you can prevent that from happening.

iv. Members asked what kids go on the early watch list. Is it the bubble students?

    1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: No it's students with low 8th grade test scores .

v. <u>Julie Smith</u>: Do they start with that information at the beginning of the year?

    1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: Yes, they receive it in the summer or in the beginning of the year. Some schools instituted summer programs such as Freshmen Connection to support students on these lists. However the quality of these programs was variable.

vi. <u>Diane Rutledge</u>: Do you believe that additional staff is required in order to have a successful intervention?

    1. <u>Elaine Allensworth:</u> Not all schools had additional staff. Some schools received money from the Gates Foundation for on-track coordinators. Other schools did not receive extra money but used their professional development time to come up with strategies for moving on-track rates. For example some schools have reevaluated their suspension policies because of the relationship between attendances and performance. Schools also would hand out the graphs that show how important attendance is to parents during meetings and at freshman orientation.

vii. <u>Stavey Davis-Gates</u>: Reconfiguration of schedules is extremely important to using the data correctly. Compiling, analyzing, collaborating with colleagues, forming interventions all makes this a job unto itself. I strongly advocate for more resources to help schools with data use. Additionally, Kenwood's boundaries allow for a better attendance rates and differs from a school such as Clemente or schools in Englewood. The environment in Kenwood makes it easier to use and implement the data as well.

viii. <u>Diane Rutledge</u>: In schools where progress was made, were teachers given additional time as well as training on how to use the data?

    1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: There was no training; it was figured out on a school by school basis. Some schools really re-organized themselves based on the data. As with anything, leadership is very important. This year because of cuts in the central office the reports won't be provided to the school. The schools must pull the data and print the reports out for themselves.

ix. <u>Jeff Mays</u>: Is this widely used or only in CPS?

    1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: It's used in CPs and other districts that have followed CPS' model. The National High School Center created a template based on what CPS uses.

x. <u>Al Llorens</u>: Some students don't register at school until a month or more after school has started. Are those considered unexcused absences or are they counted once they're enrolled?

    1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: It's not counted as unexcused because they are not enrolled yet.

xi. Members mentioned that Bloomington is piloting a data program.

xii. <u>Julie Smith</u>: How do schools share strategies with each other and convey what works?

    1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: There isn't much of that going on. It's usually schools just devising their own strategies. It's also the case that different schools have different issues so they need to come up with something that specifically works for them.

xiii. <u>Rhonda Jenkins</u>: Illinois is one of the most diverse states as far as having rural schools and urban schools. Rural schools are statistically facing some of the highest growth in ELL students and they don't have enough funding to support these students because funding is based on attendance and these are very small schools.

    1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: Rural communities have special challenges because they don't have the same resources or the scale to allow them to support their programs. It may be that they need assistance on the state level to support their students.

    2. <u>Andrea Brown:</u> Several of them are applying for Race to the Top funds. Rural schools are particularly facing a challenge when it comes to technology and broadband needs.

xiv. <u>Stacey Davis-Gates:</u> We need to consider how to best use the data. The data is being used to make high stakes decision in terms of school closings or turnarounds. There's some apprehension from schools about the data (especially over their level of power when it comes to how decisions are made). In many instances schools that have students who come in with scores of 12, 13 or 14 are shut down or turned around so we need to be very careful how we use the data.

xv. <u>Julie Wollerman</u>: The TAOEP grant is a resource that is used by rural schools and small schools to catch students that are experiencing difficulties early on.

xvi. <u>Al Llorens:</u> A lot depends on the atmosphere in school. Data should not be used to punish but as a pathway to collaboration.

xvii. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: Data can be used to show where progress has been made and where they can do more. Time and data are needed for schools to look at patterns. It's really effective when teams look at the data from the other schools to see what is being done. It allows schools to share best practices. On track rates have improved ever since schools started getting the data reports from CPS and it's consistently been going up. It focuses the conversation so that parents and teachers are using a shared language and aren't talking about outside factors that can't be changed but rather about things within the school that can be changed. It allows schools to be a lot more strategic.

xviii. <u>Miguel del Valle</u>: What's done with information that indicates that the majority of students in a particular class are failing?

    1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: That would depend on the school itself.

      xix. <u>Stacy Davis-Gates</u>: Data in CPS has often been used for "evil." In my experience as an educator the information is used to punish teachers or to drop students off the rolls in order to meet the benchmarks.

        1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: There is a bad use of data especially around the EPASS system. We do not have good procedures for using the EPASS for school improvement efforts. There isn't a lot of evidence that much can be done with those scores. In Chicago we are keeping a lot more kids and a lot of them stay around long enough to take the ACT and scores are actually going up.

      xx. <u>Miguel del Valle</u>: How much evidence is there of the relationship between safety and attendance?

        1. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: Higher safety is associated with higher attendance. Disciplinary issues in schools also lead to lower attendance because of suspensions.

        2. <u>Al Llorens</u>: School climate and safety are important. If you can increase safety you can increase attendance.

      xxi. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: When a student is given extra support the entire class benefits so it is a great idea to provide that support to the student.

IV. Next Steps:

a. <u>Miguel del Valle</u>: We will begin to compile an outline for the Commission report. I encourage everyone to begin spelling out their recommendations and sending them to Julie and Sarah so we can begin to put together an outline of a report. The November 20 meeting will likely need to go over the usual two hours; we are scheduling it from 10am – 12:30 pm.

b. <u>Elaine Allensworth</u>: If there are additional questions from the last meeting with ISBE, please let Sarah and Julie know. For example: "what is the length of time for tracking students?"

    i. <u>Julie Smith</u>: We want to clarify the length of time for tracking and whether or not they include late summer graduation in their data.

c. <u>Julie Smith</u>: The November 20 meeting will have Robert Balfanz via video conference as well as the individuals from Youth Connection Charter Schools from Jack Wuest. We will also try to bring in Elizabeth Kirby who was unable to attend today and principal Lazaro Lopez from Wheeling High School. We will send out a link to the Commission page that will have the agenda and minutes as well as resources that people might want to share.

V. Adjourn